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FAREWELL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT

STERLING,

ON

Thursday, January 21, 1819.

BY LEMUEL CAPEN,

LATE MINISTER OF STERLING.

SECOND EDITION.

ACCOMPANIED WITH DOCUMENTS CONTAINING THE REASONS OF HIS
DISMISSION.

Boston :

PRINTED BY J. T. BUCKINGHAM,

OCTOBER, 1819.

REVISED EDITION OF THE FAREWELL ADDRESS

NOTE.

THE first edition of my Farewell Address was printed at the request of my friends in Sterling, and only a few more copies were published, than it was supposed they would want. Repeated calls for it, which I could not supply, together with a wish to preserve the documents accompanying it in some other than a manuscript form, have induced me to publish this second edition.

L. CAPEN.

Dorchester, Oct. 1819.

PRINTED BY

W. B. BROWN AND COMPANY, BOSTON.

1819

AMERICAN BOOK CONCERN

NEW YORK

PRELIMINARY DOCUMENTS.

No. 1.

Extract from my answer to the Church and religious Society
in Sterling, inviting me to settle with them in the gospel
ministry, dated February 22d, 1815.

But whilst I thus express, not merely my perfect willingness, but my ardent desire to settle among you, I feel obliged in sincerity and candour, to make known my opinion, and the united voice of my friends, that the compensation you have offered is not equal to the duties of so extensive and populous a town, nor more than barely adequate to the support of a family.

To get established in life, I shall be obliged to incur an expense in addition to what I have already incurred, which a salary* barely sufficient for my support, would furnish no means for defraying. And besides, as it is offered "so long as I supply the desk, and no longer," the case is materially different from what it would be were it offered during life.—As my claims on the town must, according to their proposal, be limited by the actual performance of ministerial duties, a temporary suspension of them, from whatever cause, might expose me to great inconvenience.

It would be a subject of deep regret to me, if in thus expressing my opinion, I had left the impression, that my expectations were extravagant. Much more should I regret it, if I should be suspected of doubting the generosity of the town. My highest wish and expectation is for such a compensation as will afford me a generous support, and enable me to spare something against any exigency that may happen, and the common accidents to which all are exposed. This is my earnest wish, and this I think I may reasonably expect from my profession alone. And nothing but a perfect confidence in the generosity of the people, who have invited me to be their minister, and a full belief that they are willing to gratify such a wish and expectation, would have induced me to accept their invitation.

LEMUEL CAPEN.

* Six hundred dollars a year, and four hundred settlement.

No. 2.

In consequence of what I had suggested in my answer, respecting the insufficiency of the salary proposed to me, immediately upon my settlement in Sterling I commenced the habit of keeping an exact memorandum of my income and expenses ;

the result of which, (at the end of three years,) I found to be such, that I felt it to be an indispensable duty to communicate it to my society, which I did at a town meeting on the first Monday in November, 1818. It appeared from this, that the necessary expenses of my own family had been not less than \$600 a year, and the addition of scholars, and other boarders about \$200 more. That my debts, including unsettled accounts, and what I had contracted for property unpaid for, amounted to nearly as much as the value of my estate,—and that without continuing the instruction of scholars, which I had already found absolutely incompatible with the right discharge of my ministerial duties, or having some other resort, I must soon inevitably be falling into arrears, at the rate of at least \$120 a year, and be contracting debts, for which I should have no property to answer.

The deliberations upon this communication led to the following request for a dismissal.

No. 3.

To the Inhabitants of Sterling, in Town Meeting assembled.

Friends and Fellow-Citizens,

As it is doubtless understood that this Meeting was called at my particular request, and contemplates as a part of its business the acting upon a proposal for the dissolution of my ministerial contract, it is rendered highly necessary, not merely for the information of this assembly, but of the public, and of posterity, that the reasons on which this proposal is grounded should be distinctly, definitely, and clearly stated. And as I can most sincerely and explicitly say, that they originated in no disaffection with the people of my charge, and no discontent with my situation; but merely in the embarrassed state of my pecuniary affairs, which was made known to the town in a communication from me, at their Meeting in November last; I have therefore, felt it my duty first to solicit your attention to that communication, so that if any means can be devised for continuing my connexion, consistent with the peace and harmony of the town, and with my own comfort and usefulness as their minister, those means may not be left untried.

Yet since it appears to be the general impression, as far as I can learn, that an addition to my salary, or any other means which the town might propose, sufficient for my permanent relief, would greatly diminish that very general union and harmony, which now happily prevails in the town, and since I am fully convinced, that the continuance of my connexion would be attended with too many and great difficulties, both to the town and to myself; I have come to the conclusion, that the dissolution of it, however painful, will eventually be for our mutual interest.

It is therefore my request, that the town would grant me a dismissal from my ministerial relation to them, and unite with me in calling an ecclesiastical council to ratify our doings;

in appointing a time and place for their convening, and in whatever measures may be necessary to give full effect to the separation.

Your sincere friend and pastor,

LEMUEL CAPEN.

January 4, 1819.

No. 4.

IN TOWN MEETING,—Sterling, January 21st, 1819.

Voted, That after mature deliberation on the communication of the Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN, of the 4th instant, and the consequent result on that communication, we cannot with honour to ourselves and justice to *him*, but declare, that we received his communication with extreme regret and concern; that the manner in which his request was disposed of, was not the result of dissatisfaction as to his acquirements as a Scholar, his deportment as a Man, or his attainments as a Christian; but the conviction that an addition to his salary at this early period, might materially endanger that universal harmony which now so happily prevails among us.

And while we believe that the talents of men, as well as their speculative opinions, are not fit subjects for us to judge of for others; yet we consider the principles of morality to be universal; and we do *most* cordially declare our fullest confidence in his character for purity of heart and rectitude of life.

It now only remains for us to wish him all the joys and hopes of the good Man, the polished Scholar, the sincere Friend, and the real Christian.

Voted, That the Clerk be directed to furnish the Rev. Mr. Capen with a copy of the foregoing vote.

A true copy.

LUTHER ALLEN, *Town Clerk*.

No. 5.

Extract from the result of an Ecclesiastical Council, composed of Ministers and Delegates from the churches in Lancaster, Bolton, and Princeton, convened at Sterling, January 21, 1819, at the request of Rev. Mr. Capen, and the church and society in that place.

From a deliberate review of the proceedings of the Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN, and the church and society in Sterling, relative to a dissolution of his pastoral relation to them, we collect the following facts, viz.—On the first Monday of November last, a communication was made by him to the town of his pecuniary embarrassments, and of the inadequacy of any means now in his possession for his relief. On the 4th instant, at a Town Meeting called at the request of Mr. Capen, learning from an intercourse with his people, that the town did not consider it consistent with the preservation of their union to increase his

annual salary, he submitted to them a request that his pastoral relation might be dissolved ; which request was accordingly granted. A similar request was made by him to the church, who also voted their compliance. Wherefore,

Voted, That while we feel a deep regret, that circumstances exist which should dissolve an union which time has endeared, the communication of the Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN, and the proceedings of the church and town appear to us to have been under the direction of a christian spirit, and are regular ; and that his relation to the congregational church and society in Sterling be, and hereby is, dissolved.

This Ecclesiastical Council feel constrained to express our mingled joy and lamentation, which have been excited by a review of the present state and prospects of our fellow Christians in this town. We have learned with peculiar satisfaction, that during the ministry of the Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN, this Christian Society has been in peace. In his instructions he has kept back nothing which was profitable. He has abstained from the encouragement of a spirit of controversy, and from the discussion of topics " which minister to strife rather than to godly edifying." Testimony is borne by those who have been his constant witnesses, to his exemplariness, to their increasing satisfaction in his public labours, and to the prospect of continued union. We have deliberately considered the steps he has taken as previously necessary to his separation from a people whom he respected and loved. We find in the disclosure of his pecuniary concerns a frankness and sincerity which are highly estimable. We are persuaded, the impression that his embarrassments were such as he had no means to retrieve, that his usefulness would thereby be prevented, and that it was his imperious duty " to provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household," led him to ask a dismissal.

Evidence has been given us that this people have fulfilled their civil contract, and have shewn towards their minister many tokens of kindness and liberality.

We affectionately recommend the Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN to the ministers and churches of Christ, as one who has been " an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." We sympathise with him under his trials, and devoutly pray that he may still be honoured as an instrument " in defending the faith which was once delivered to the saints ;" and that he may have the consolations and rewards of long tried and persevering fidelity.

NATHANIEL THAYER, *Moderator.*

SAMUEL CLARKE, *Scribe.*

A true copy. Attest,

SAMUEL CLARKE, *Scribe.*

Peace among Christians.

A VALEDICTORY SERMON.

—
ST. JOHN, xiv. 27.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.

THE whole history of the Christian religion proves it to be a religion of peace. The ministry and the character of its Founder especially conspire to place this truth beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt. His birth was announced with the joyous benediction—“On earth peace; good will toward men.” The life of Jesus was meek and peaceful. He “came and preached peace.” With admirable propriety and strength of expression, therefore, the apostle says, “He is our peace.” Besides the many direct exhortations which he gave to a quiet and peaceful temper and life, he constantly inculcated and enjoined the cultivation and exercise of all those dispositions, affections, and sentiments, which naturally tend to produce peace; whilst he no less constantly prohibited those of the opposite tendency and character. He pronounced blessings on the peace-makers, as entitled to the special favour of God. “Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God.” And at last, when he was about to “leave the world, and go to the Father,” his parting benediction to his disciples was, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”

The general inference to be drawn from these observations is—that wherever we behold the spirit of peace eminently exhibited—I mean, that genuine peace, which springs from mutual love and good will, there also we may be certain is much of the spirit of Christ; because

a peaceful temper and disposition is so eminent a trait in the Christian character.

On the other hand, the spirit of contention and discord is no less at variance with the Christian temper and character than it is with meekness and peace. It is precisely as an apostle has described—"where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."

Contentions, however, and bitter contentions too, it must be acknowledged, have been and continue to be common among those "who name the name of Christ." But these are not the natural fruits of christianity.—They originate in the corrupt passions of men, and not in the nature of the religion of Jesus. They do not, therefore, furnish any evidence against its truth and excellence. But they furnish the most melancholy evidence of the great mistake of those who call themselves his true disciples, whilst they manifest so little of love toward one another. For "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance." And "the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits."

The unsoundness of those principles, therefore—the spuriousness of those professions of religion, of love to God, and faith in his Son Jesus Christ, is most clearly demonstrated, which are not accompanied with these essential proofs of the Christian temper and character; or which are accompanied with the spirit and the fruits of envy, intolerance, hatred, contention, and discord.

To something radically wrong in one or both parties, may contentions among Christians generally be traced. And perhaps in most instances they arise from a mutual want of condescension and forbearance—of that charity which "suffereth long, and is kind." They are not unfrequently caused by an unwarrantable zeal for particular names, and modes, and forms, and tenets, which, however true and important in any respects they may be, do not involve the essentials of christianity.

A sentiment prevails among many professing Christians at the present day, and shameful indeed it is that it should any where in Christendom prevail, in the nineteenth century of the Christian era—that they ought not to receive the instructions or the ordinances of the

gospel from a minister, however pious and exemplary his life, nor even worship with a society or with individuals, whose views of Christian doctrine differ considerably from their own. The insupportable burden of expense often unnecessarily incurred, in consequence of this, to furnish themselves with separate places of worship, and separate religious teachers, is trifling, compared with the dismemberment of churches, the contentions in society, the disturbance of domestick repose, the alienation of friendship, the malice, hatred, and revenge—and in short, every thing hostile to the mild and peaceful religion of Jesus, which too often flows from such sentiments and measures. What! can we not cordially unite in acts of worship with all who “call on the name of the Lord,” through the “one Mediator,” unless we entertain precisely the same views as they do of the Saviour and his doctrines? Can we not admit to our communion, and to the common privileges of Christians, any who cannot in conscience, and consistently with their supreme veneration for the character of God, and for the authority of their Lord and Master, and with their deepest convictions of truth and duty, subscribe to our creeds and confessions of faith? Can we not patiently hear any minister of the gospel, of whatever denomination, and be edified by his instructions, who earnestly and affectionately, in the true spirit of his Master and of his religion, calls on men to “repent and believe the gospel,” and “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,”—the fruits of righteousness and holiness, of peace and of love?—who preaches “Jesus Christ, and him crucified,” “the way, the truth, and the life,” the only “name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;” unless he wrests these doctrines from that general attitude in which they stand in the scriptures, and moulds them into the precise forms, and clothes them in the same dress with which they are invested in our own imaginations? Then it is to be feared we shall find many of the discourses of John the Baptist, of the apostles and primitive teachers of christianity, and even of Christ himself, uninteresting and uninteresting. If this is the case, it is much to be feared that it is ourselves, and our doctrines, that we love to have preached, and not “Christ Jesus the Lord.”

It is not a sufficient excuse to plead, that by joining in acts of worship, and the observance of ordinances, with

those whom we deem essentially erroneous, we countenance their errors, and become partakers of their sins. For, in the first place, when we denounce any error as a fundamental one, which is not most evidently made to appear such in the scriptures, in a manner so clear and intelligible, that it cannot be mistaken by the unlettered Christian, who reads with a mind free from those prejudices and prepossessions which are unfriendly to the reception of truth; or when we set up any article of belief, or term of communion, as essential, which is not with equal clearness declared to be essential in the word of God; we then demand of our brother something which God has not demanded. And, as he possesses the same natural right of reading the scriptures, and judging of their meaning as ourselves, he may with equal justice and propriety set up, as essentials, his particular views of the doctrines of the gospel, and impose them on us. Every distinct sect of Christians, and indeed every individual has an equal right to do the same. And thus is laid the foundation of endless contentions and divisions; and Christian unity and peace are interrupted and destroyed.

The conduct of those Christians who deem uniformity of sentiment essential to participation in worship and ordinances, is often inconsistent; as they not unfrequently bear with considerable immoralities in some with whom they worship and commune, provided they harmonize with them in their peculiar sentiments; whilst a difference in opinion, though unexceptionable in morals, would exclude them from the privilege of communion.

I mean not by this to censure them for exercising all proper lenity and charity towards the common frailties and imperfections of their Christian brethren. But I do mean to censure, as unreasonable and inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, and injurious to purity of morals, that conduct, wherever it may appear, which proceeds with greater severity against those differences of opinion about the doctrines and ceremonies of religion, which can have no influence whatever on the moral character, or on practical christianity, than against those manifest irregularities which stain and degrade the Christian character. Neither can we be justified in absenting ourselves from the publick worship of God, and attendance on his ordinances, because many of the opinions of our fellow-worshippers may be different from our own, or because the preacher does

not recommend and enforce the exclusive importance of our own particular tenets from the sacred desk, and denounce and vilify, on account of their opinions, those who differ in opinion from us. Allowing them to be in error, a breach or improper performance of religious duty on their part, cannot justify it on ours. The attendance on religious worship and ordinances is a duty we owe to God, and not exclusively to our Christian brethren, or Christian teachers. If they neglect or improperly discharge their duties, the way is open for their correction. It becomes us to warn and reprove with all long-suffering and the meekness of wisdom. But if we withdraw from worship or communion, we make ourselves also transgressors.

These observations may serve to illustrate, in some measure, those essential principles of Christian union and peace, upon which are grounded the exhortations contained in the following address. We may see that it is by no means necessary, nor even possible, that Christians should precisely agree in the articles of their belief, in order to their harmoniously uniting together in acts of worship, and attendance on ordinances—in order to their being benefited in the highest degree by the institutions of religion, and participating most largely in the benign influences of Christian truth. The very extensive variety of circumstances under which different individuals are born and educated, which may produce an innocent difference in opinion, should teach us not to expect uniformity of belief. And the character of the scriptures, taken as a whole, is such, that it is rendered not only difficult, but impossible for any, even the most wise and learned, to arrive at an absolutely certain knowledge and understanding of them, in all respects. This circumstance, while it presents an immovable bar, placed as it were by the hand of God, against an entire uniformity of belief, which is not essential to our moral and religious improvement, or to our present or future happiness; furnishes the most ample scope for patient and humble inquiry and investigation, and for the cultivation and exercise of those cardinal virtues of meekness, forbearance and charity, which are essential to our happiness both here and hereafter. If all the doctrines really taught in the bible, were in any part of that volume collected together, in the most definite form, within a narrow compass, and expressed with critical and studied accuracy, then might we

perhaps be justified in insisting upon uniformity of belief. But this, instead of being an improvement, would actually render the scriptures less valuable. It is but a just tribute to the volume of inspiration to say, and the reflection is of itself calculated to confirm us in the belief of its divine origin, that no book of religion and morality could have been better adapted to the different situations, and circumstances, and capacities of mankind. Written as it was by different individuals, in different ages, and in different languages, and connected as it is with the history, the customs, the learning and government of remotest nations and remotest times, and with the lives of the earliest progenitors of the human family; it opens the widest range of investigation to the strongest and most improved understandings, and furnishes the most ample room for progressive improvement; whilst its essential doctrines, and practical principles are open to the humblest capacity.

If these observations be correct, an answer will not be difficult to the question—What will most effectually promote and secure peace among Christians? In the first place, they are to be encouraged by all the motives that can be presented, to study the scriptures humbly, attentively and prayerfully, and unshackled as much as possible by preconceived opinions; not with a view to make themselves skilful disputants, but more enlightened and better Christians. And if, in the course of this study, they find “some things hard to be understood,” they must not be surprised, for an inspired apostle has taught us to expect them. Neither must they “wrest” them “to their own destruction,” or the destruction of their fellow Christians, by hastily and confidently passing sentence upon their meaning. They should rather pass them reverently and modestly by, as difficulties, than believe not only that they may understand, but be absolutely certain that they understand, all that is taught in the bible. They are, however, notwithstanding the difficulties they may find in their religious inquiries, to exercise all reasonable and proper confidence in their own opinions of scripture doctrine, so far as they can understand it. For this is necessary to the free enjoyment of those opinions, which may be mentioned in the next place, as essential to peace among Christians. If it be the right and the duty of Christians to examine the scriptures for themselves, for the purpose of gaining a know-

ledge of their doctrines and precepts, the right of enjoying their opinions must flow as a natural consequence of such religious freedom.

For though this freedom of inquiry be indeed a right, which is not left to the discretion of man either to give or to take away, yet so far as Christians may take it upon them to concede it, it can be no privilege, unless they at the same time concede the full and free enjoyment of his own particular opinions to every individual. And never will there be peace, either in separate Christian societies, or among the great body of Christians, until the rights of free inquiry, and of private judgment are really, in their fullest extent, admitted, and carried into effect—till Christians of every denomination will agree patiently and charitably to bear with each other in those differences of opinion, which after all must and will exist. Besides the numberless other advantages of this equal and charitable course of conduct, it is better calculated than any other to produce uniformity of belief, and will effect that object so far as it is desirable it should be effected. And it will most certainly effect what is much more desirable—a union of affections among Christians. It will serve “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace.” Any mere difference in speculative opinions, therefore, either about the rites and ordinances, or the doctrines of our religion, should never be an obstacle to participation in worship and communion, or to mutual love and good will. Neither are Christians authorized to annex penalties and privations to the belief or disbelief of religious doctrines. These are weapons not to be wielded by mortal hands. This is the prerogative only of Heaven.

It is readily admitted, that, where Christians of particular denominations are sufficiently numerous to form separate societies, and support separate worship, it may be both more pleasant and profitable for them to enjoy Christian worship and ordinances by themselves, and in their own way. But where their natural situation, or other circumstances bring Christians of different sentiments and denominations together in one society, they should freely and cheerfully worship and commune together.

Such an extent of religious freedom, and such a stretch of charity, it may be said, will be attended with great evils; it will serve to neutralize christianity, and amalgamate truth with error. Unworthy professors, it may be

insisted, will thus be encouraged to flock into the church. In reply, I would ask, will the most rigid adherence to creeds and confessions, however precisely and definitely drawn, prevent those who are disposed to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience? And what plan of man's device will not be attended with greater evils? If the rules and doctrines of scripture, in their own language and form, will not exclude from the church insincere and unworthy professors, there is not only folly, but arrogance and presumption on the face of the supposition, that men can effect it by their best explanations of the scriptures, or by collecting the best summaries of Christian doctrine. It is not our prerogative to judge the hearts of men; and after all our caution we may be deceived. By being too scrupulous, also, we may seriously injure the Christian cause, by keeping many conscientious and worthy Christians from the church. And we should be especially careful, "lest while we gather up the tares, we root up also the wheat with them." These principles of toleration do not lead us to confound all religious doctrines. They do not require us to surrender or undervalue our own religious opinions, but merely to cherish a proper regard for the opinions of others. For my own part, it is a subject of the purest satisfaction and joy to me, to believe that the time will come, must come, though I may not see it, when all professing Christians, of every denomination, will so far yield their convictions of the exclusive importance of their own particular views of Christian doctrines, rites, discipline and government, that they may not only cordially "love as brethren," but live, and worship, and commune together in peace.

It is indeed the duty of every Christian, but more especially of every Christian minister, to urge, with all the force of honest and fair persuasion, what he conceives to be the most important and essential doctrines of his religion.—But let us all be careful to reduce our catalogue of essentials most scrupulously to the standard of scripture, in language, in number, weight and measure. Let the scriptures speak for themselves: they are as definite and as intelligible as their Author intended they should be. Let all men examine them, and judge for themselves. It is a privilege which their Creator intended they should enjoy: nay, it is a duty, which he has most solemnly enjoined upon them. And as a minister of the blessed Jesus, the Prince of Peace,

I do not feel myself authorized to recommend any additional guard at the entrance of the Christian church ; or to encourage an attack against any of my ministerial or Christian brethren, for their differences of opinion. "To their own Master they stand or fall." And "we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." It rather becomes us all, therefore, to lay down "the weapons of our warfare," and "provoke one another to love and good works." Instead of calling on the different sects of Christians to come out, and separate themselves from each other ; or of doing any thing which might cause or increase division. I would rather extend the silken cord of love, of charity, which "draws all to agree."

Most cautiously would I abstain from every thing, which might cause the rays of Christian light and heat to diverge from their natural and appointed course. By bringing them nearer to a point, we shall be the most warmed and cheered by their influence.

The people of my late pastoral charge feel, I trust, a peculiar interest in the subject, no less than in the circumstances, of the present occasion. I would not have it suspected, however, that I have chosen it from any apprehension that unchristian divisions will spring up among you ; but because it is so peculiarly descriptive of your situation, and so perfectly congenial with my own feelings. Yes, my beloved people, (for you will permit me yet to call you so,) our connexion and intercourse has been perfectly harmonious ; and I assure you of my most devout wishes and prayers, that peace may still continue among you. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." Such uninterrupted harmony and mutual good understanding have continued to subsist between us, through all the steps that have led to our separation, that I can hardly realize I am taking my leave of you. It seems rather like a dream, an illusion of the imagination ; and happy should I be to awake and find it so. But, however I may wish it otherwise, I am obliged to consider it a reality. But a few days ago, (for, amidst my contentment and happiness, the time has flown swiftly away,) we were congratulating each other on our new-formed connexion, and flattering ourselves that it would be lasting ; and now we are sorrowing that we must bid each other farewell. The sun of our fond

hopes and expectations "has gone down ere it was yet day." My ministry has indeed been short ;* yet, in perfect sincerity, I can say it has been very pleasant to me. Much would it contribute to my satisfaction to believe that it has been in the same degree profitable to you. But whatever may have been the result, as it respects fidelity on my part, or profit on yours, it is now sealed up against our final account.

The thought of being separated from you thus early has always been painful to me ; and I have no reason to suppose it less so to you. But however unpleasant maybe the dissolution of a connexion, attended with so many happy circumstances on both sides, I am confirmed in the belief, that in the present instance it is expedient. The reasons assigned by me in my communication to you still prevail with me to justify the measure. It is not necessary here to repeat them. But acknowledging as I ever have, and still most cheerfully and gratefully do, the repeated instances of your generosity to me, I could not submit to the idea of being burdensome to you by urging repeated claims, and thus endangering that unusual degree of harmony and unanimity, which now so happily subsists among you, as a religious society, and as a town. It affords me much satisfaction to be able to say, that I have been induced to this measure by no motives of discontent, or ambition, and by no diaffection with my people. And since we must separate, it is a circumstance, which, though it renders the separation much more painful, and much more to be regretted, still leaves much consolation, and will ever remain a subject of the purest satisfaction to us all, that we separate with such mutual attachments and mutual good wishes.

I know my own feelings, and I express no more than I feel, when I acknowledge the constant and high degree of pleasure which I have enjoyed in this place ; and add, that if circumstances could have permitted, I should have been contented still to remain, and spend my days in your service. These feelings I most confidently believe are very generally reciprocated by you. And but few instances, I presume, can be found of so harmonious a dissolution of the pastoral relation, where the causes have originated so little in any personal dissatisfactions of either party. These circum-

* The Rev. LEMUEL CAPEN was ordained at Sterling March 22, 1815.

stances will operate greatly to your advantage in the re-settlement of the ministry. But still you must expect many occasions which will demand the spirit of mutual forbearance and conciliation. An apparently trifling want of the peaceful and condescending temper of the gospel, might, in many instances, greatly endanger your union and tranquillity ; might introduce lasting discord and confusion.— It is, therefore, most devoutly to be wished, by all who are interested in your welfare, that every individual among you would consider himself in some measure responsible for the continuance of your union and harmony, in all your future deliberations and measures for the re-establishment and support of the ministry : that, acting from the firmest convictions of duty, and under the guidance of an enlightened conscience, every member of this society would feel ambitious to preserve it unbroken and peaceful ; not merely because such general unanimity has ever prevailed among you, and because contentions and divisions would be so highly detrimental to your worldly interests ; but more especially, because they are so entirely subversive of the Christian temper, and ruinous to the Christian character. Let the consideration be deeply engraved on your minds, that religious, no less than civil institutions, are designed to promote the general good ; and, consequently, that one or a few individuals, whatever may be their professions or characters, have no right to expect their individual wishes to be gratified, or their private interests to be advanced, in opposition to the wishes, or at the expense of the main body of a religious society. The principle should rather be cherished, that individual privilege and gratification is to be sought in the general advantage and accommodation ; or, in other words, that the interests of each individual are most advanced, when the greatest number are pleased and benefited. In religious transactions, especially, it is of the highest importance, that individuals should be willing to surrender their personal desires of accommodation as much as possible to those of their society.

The splitting up of towns and parishes into sects and parties, to gratify an obstinate will, or a revengeful temper, is but too common at the present day. There is also some reason to fear, that the rights and injunctions of conscience are but little less frequently and unreasonably pleaded in extenuation of such measures. Thus conscience is charg-

ed with a load of folly and guilt, which by no means belongs to it. The evils thence arising to society at large, as well as to the promoters of such measures, and their destructive influence on the dearest interests of Christianity, are too numerous to be detailed, and too apparent to be called in question, or to need describing. Individuals too, in many instances, apparently to avoid a trifling expense, pretend a change in their views of religion, and join themselves to another denomination. This practice, perhaps, is much more criminal than is generally imagined. The disavowal of a person's former belief and mode of worship is commendable, nay, it is an imperious duty, when it is the result of serious and candid inquiry, and real conviction; but on no other ground can it be justifiable or innocent.— This tampering with conscience, and making light of the most solemn transactions, is in effect perjury, and too manifestly proves the entire want of any real principles of religion.

The members of this society, I trust, view these practices in too just a light to allow themselves to fall into them. To bring the subject nearer to you, what would it be for any individual among you to surrender some favourite wish for the sake of promoting the general peace and harmony; or to meet some additional expense for the support of the regular and established worship and instruction, in comparison with seeing this town, like many others, broken into sects, and everlasting discord and confusion breaking in upon you?

I know you are all not merely willing, but desirous of having the ministry generously supported among you; but it is not to be supposed that you should all be equally able to judge what is necessary thus to support it. Let no difference of opinion on this point, therefore, be suffered to interrupt your harmony, and cause unhappy divisions.— Besides the necessary expenses of living, the minister of the gospel must meet various other expenses, almost equally necessary, and has frequent demands upon his charity and hospitality, which his people know but little of. And if he possess the true spirit of his religion, and his calling, how must he often be most keenly mortified, if he is not able to satisfy such demands. And furthermore, if he be faithful in his calling, it is no more than equal, that he be able, like his fellow-citizens, to lay up something from it, against any future exigency of himself or family,

Consider me not as advocating the idea, that the ministers of the gospel must be supported in luxury and sumptuousness, or be enabled by their people to amass rich fortunes. On the contrary, it is most indispensably incumbent on them, not only to discountenance in their exhortations the extravagancies of the times, but also to set an example of moderation, of prudence and frugality. It must not be forgotten, however, that they are preachers of charity, of benevolence, as well as of temperance and moderation. It is their duty to prove in their teachings how much "more blessed it is to give than to receive."—But what effect will their reasonings produce, if their habitual practice contradicts their precepts, and proves that they have never enjoyed this luxury of doing good. ?

It is to be considered, moreover, that this town is extensive and populous beyond most of those around you. And as this religious society comprehends most of the population, the duties of your minister must be more laborious and multiplied, and your means of compensation also multiplied beyond most of your neighbouring societies : so that their example can furnish no just rule for you.

But it is more especially to be considered, that, after all, you will reap by far the greatest benefit from all your generosity to your minister. If he shall possess that nice sense of duty, which he must possess to be worthy of his office ; and if to do good be the great object of his life, every thing which you may bestow upon him, to enable him to devote his time and his talents exclusively to the ministry, he will reward ten-fold into your own bosoms, by redoubling his exertions to make his instructions more interesting and useful ; but more especially to make himself useful in that most important branch of duty which consists in frequent and familiar visits among you, and thus entering with his whole soul into all your interests and sympathies.

But I forbear. Perhaps I have already overstepped the bounds both of delicacy and propriety. If so, I have done it through my strong feelings of interest for your future peace and happiness, in the enjoyment of all the benefits of Christian institutions ; presuming that, whatever you might think of these remarks, you would at least receive them with candour, since I have always claimed of you the privilege of using great plainness of speech. At this crisis of our affairs you will not, of course, suspect that I say these

things for my own sake, or that it might be so done unto me. And after my repeated acknowledgments of your kindness to me, you cannot consider it the language of censure.

And now let me affectionately entreat you in the language of inspiration to study "the things which make for peace, and things, wherewith one may edify another."—"Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you." I shall always take such an interest in your affairs, wherever my lot may be cast, that though I "be absent in the flesh, I shall be with you in the spirit," and, as I hope and trust, "joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."—Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."

My feelings will not allow me to proceed with my closing addresses, without expressing my acknowledgments to my brethren in the ministry here present. It is not, I assure, you, my brethren, among the least of the unpleasant circumstances attendant on my separation from this people, that it must separate me from your more immediate intercourse. I have but little more than become acquainted with you, and begun to enjoy your society; and now I am to be separated from you. But man is born to disappointment and sorrow. And the implied condition of the most interesting and pleasant connexions of mortal life is, that they must sooner or later, be dissolved. It is infinitely more than an equivalent, however, for all the pains of earthly separations, that the virtuous attachments here formed, however short their duration, will be renewed in heaven, and be immortal. Peculiarly animating to us, my brethren, are such reflections, in view of that exalted dignity and glory to which we shall be exalted, if we continue faithful unto death, in being numbered with those who shall have turned many to righteousness, to shine "as the brightness of the firmament," "and as the stars forever and ever."

Accept my sincere thanks for all your counsel and kind attentions, and for the confidence you have reposed in me; and grant me an interest in your prayers, that I may bear my trials and disappointments with fortitude and patience,

and yet be useful in the ministry. Accept also my best wishes for your peace and prosperity. Ever may you continue to enjoy the confidence and the affections of your people, and the blessings of heaven; and may your labours be crowned with abundant success. And at last may you be admitted to the rewards of good and faithful servants, and "enter into the joy of your Lord."

"Finally brethren," of this religious society, "farewell!" I have spoken enough, perhaps too much, for the occasion, though not enough for my feelings; and I must draw to a close. Brethren, it is the last time. I have now finished my course of duty among you. I go away, and come not again unto you as your minister. It will be very pleasant to me to be with you in occasional ministrations. And I most ardently hope that my future situation will be such, that I can often minister to you in the word. But my voice you will no more hear as your pastor. I now resign my pastoral office. And though in one sense I leave you "as sheep without a shepherd," yet I leave you not comfortless. I leave you not in circumstances of danger, if you be faithful to your own best interests and highest duties. I leave you under the immediate oversight and care of the chief "Shepherd and Bishop of souls." I leave you to the teaching and guidance of God's holy Spirit, which he will not withhold from you, if you ask it in sincerity. And above all, as the surety and earnest that God will continue to guide your feet in the way of peace, I leave you a peaceful and united people. Happy indeed will you be if you continue thus united. And if you all resolve to study "the things which make for peace," you will be in no danger of division and alienation. And though we now have sorrow, because our very pleasant connexion and intercourse must cease, yet if you pursue the course of wisdom and prudence, I trust "I shall see you again, and your hearts will rejoice"—rejoice in another pastor, who will remain with you, who will happily unite your suffrages and affections, and faithfully preach to you the gospel of peace.

Members of this church, farewell! You will no more receive the ordinances from mine, but as I hope and pray, from better hands. "Hold fast the profession of your faith" unto the end, and let the light of your Christian example shine on all around you. And if we shall no more be permitted to unite in acts of worship and the obser-

vance of ordinances on earth, let us hope that we shall at last be united to “the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven.”

My aged friends, farewell! While I have been among you, you have particularly shared in my sympathies, and in my prayers for divine consolations and supports in the decline of life. As your bodily strength decays, and you feel that you are bending over the grave, may your inward strength increase more and more. May you still be supported by the aids of God’s holy Spirit, and by the consolations of his word. May the evening of your days be cheered by the promises and hopes of immortality. To each of you may the “hoary head be a crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness.”

My friends in middle life, farewell! In the vigour of your days, amidst the joys of promise, the ardour of pursuit, and the harvest of enjoyment, forget not that you are mortal, and that all your earthly enjoyments are uncertain and unsubstantial. Deprive not yourselves of the pleasures, the aids and the hopes of religion. Trust not in your own strength—it will fail you. Trust not to the world—it will disappoint you. But trust ye in the Lord, for “with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

My young friends, children and youth, farewell! Sensible that yours is a peculiarly critical and important period of life, I have ever felt for you a peculiar interest. I have constantly borne you with affectionate solicitude to the throne of grace. And in my discourses I have laboured more especially to impress on your minds the unspeakable importance of early piety; of laying the only sure foundation of rational and substantial enjoyment on earth, and of preparing for the peaceful and endless enjoyments of heaven, in knowledge and virtue; in cultivating the best faculties of the mind, and the best affections of the heart, in habitual and devout meditation and prayer. I hope my labours and prayers have not been altogether in vain to your precious souls. And when I shall be absent from you in person, if you shall recollect any good advice, any salutary cautions and instructions, or any affectionate and impressive exhortations, which you have received from me, let me entreat you to cherish them, together with the remembrance of me, in your hearts, and improve them to your advancement in the Christian temper and life,

Farewell, old and young—people of every age, rank and condition! Ever grant me an interest in your prayers.— Follow me with your kind wishes. Cherish my memory with affection; and spread the mantle of charity over my failings—my imperfections. You may rest assured, that too many pleasant associations will ever rise in my mind with the recollection of this place to be ever forgotten.— Again accept my thanks for all your kindness, and forbearance; for the candour with which you have listened to my instructions; for the satisfaction you have manifested with my services, and the confidence you have reposed in my character. No opportunity, in my power, of doing you good shall ever be neglected. But may the Lord reward you infinitely beyond what it will be in my power to do. May he bless you with temporal, but more especially with spiritual blessings. May he multiply and prolong the days of your peace. May he give you to enjoy, plenteously and richly, the benefits of religious institutions. May he prepare you, by all the discipline of his providence, by the blessings he may bestow, and the disappointments and afflictions he may send, to meet his presence at last, and to rejoice with exceeding joy.

What my future lot and situation may be, is altogether uncertain. It is known only to Him who knoweth all things. But since I have constantly, and, as I trust, devoutly sought his all-wise direction, while I have had this measure in contemplation, and have been particularly desirous not to do any thing, which might cause me remorse and dissatisfaction in the review; I consider my separation from you as the direction of Providence. And being called to go out, I obey like the patriarch of old, in the most literal sense of the words, not knowing whither I go. I throw myself again, under Providence, upon the wide world, and thence look for employment and support. But not for myself alone am I at this time solicitous. Most tenderly am I interested for those, also, whom God has placed under my protection and care; who are destined to share with me in all my fortune, and who are far less able than myself to endure the trials, the disappointments, and hardships on the journey of life.

But I will harbour no anxious fear or distrust. Hitherto I have had my desert from the world, and hitherto Heaven has smiled upon me. If I am now to meet with misfor-

tunes, it becomes me, therefore, to meet them without repining, and still confide in the care and direction of God. My highest wish and most devout prayer is, to be again established in the ministry, and to be useful therein. This still is, as it ever has been, my favourite object—the profession of my early choice. Till this, my wish, is accomplished, I hope to be useful in some humbler employment.

But I will no longer detain and weary you with myself or my concerns. Once more, and I shall have done.

Farewell, then, to this consecrated Temple of the Most High! Long may you resound the strains of peace. Long may you bear witness to the union and peace of this people, when they shall assemble within thy walls to hear the gospel of peace; to seek an intercourse with heaven, and enjoy the presence and blessing of God. And when this generation shall be made meet for glory, and be gathered to their fathers, may their peaceful descendants find thee to be “the gate of heaven.” “May they prosper that love thee.”—“Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.”

[NOTE.—It may not be improper to notice in this place, that by the unanimous voice of the Society in Sterling. Rev. PETER OSGOOD was ordained to be their Minister, June 30th, 1819.—And that the author has realized his anticipations in the 21st page of this discourse, (10th line from the bottom, &c.) in being indulged with an opportunity to address them from St. John iii, 29.—“This my joy therefore is fulfilled.”]

